

ARIGO: SURGEON OF THE RUSTY KNIFE. By John G. Fuller. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1974. Pp. 274. \$7.95.

One night in 1950 a farm-bred, poorly educated thirty-two-year-old Brazilian tavern keeper and sometime labor union official nicknamed by his familiars Arigo ("Jovial Country Bumpkin" in Portuguese) burst into the hotel room of a senator campaigning in a nearby town. With eyes glazed and brandishing a razor, he announced, in a voice with a thick German accent, that he would have to perform an emergency operation. The astonished senator felt no fear (so the story goes) but conveniently blacked out. When he came to there was no sign of the intruder, whom he had just met earlier that day, but he saw that a neat clean incision had somehow been made on the back of his rib cage. On the following day Arigo, who denied all knowledge of what had transpired, went into shock when he was told about the affair. The senator, for his part, very shortly found that he had somehow been completely relieved of a lung cancer for which he had been told to go to the United States for surgery but which he had (somewhat strangely, one would think) put off because of the demands of the upcoming elections.

This event was supposedly the culmination of one phase of a healing vocation that had begun in Arigo (whose real name was José Pedro de Freitas) several years before, following a series of nightmarish hallucinations and dreams in which a figure calling himself Dr. Adolpho Fritz, a German surgeon who had died during the First World War, announced that he had chosen Arigo to carry on his work. At first Arigo, a strict Catholic, had resisted such a call and even submitted to formal exorcism procedures by the Church to rid him of his disturbing voices and visions. But at length he gave in and began to practice a suggestive type of healing among the sick of his small town of Congonhas do Campo. The affair with the senator was apparently his first excursion into surgery. After this, however, it became impossible for Arigo to keep simply to suggestive techniques. When the senator had his amazing recovery officially confirmed, he exuberantly broadcast the story to all who would listen. Within days, and by the grace of an all-too-cooperative press, everyone in Brazil had heard about the marvelous *curandeiro*. From here on, with time out for a couple of spells in jail for practicing medicine without a license (and there hundreds of patients would line up in the alley outside and receive Arigo's ministrations with the guards' blessing) Arigo ran a clinic to rival the Mayos.

There were, however, certain noteworthy differences. For one thing, no attempt at surgical sterility—or in fact at any ordinary surgical techniques—was made. Arigo, talking gruffly with a heavy German accent, as if a reincarnated Dr. Fritz were actually handling the whole procedure, would commandeer any pen or pocket knife that happened to be handy and thrust it into whatever part of a patient's anatomy—limb, abdomen, chest, neck, face, eye—needed "cleaning." This he would do as soon as a patient came up to him in the long line of sick and ailing, without even asking the patient what was wrong. After a relatively brief (seconds to a minute or two) period of wiggling and scraping, the knife would be withdrawn (sometimes with a bit of "liver," "lung" or whatnot), wiped unceremoniously on Arigo's shirt or trousers, and the call for the next patient would be barked out. Here another difference from the Mayo and other clinic experience was noted: not a single patient, according to thousands of accounts (as alleged by the author of this book), ever experienced pain or developed a postoperative infection. A third difference (all the more notable in these days of rising malpractice suits) was that apparently no patient, again according to the story, ever complained of being harmed by treatment or even of feeling worse afterward. And this went also for apparently tens of thousands of persons who were given prescriptions—prescriptions for little-known drugs in combinations that made medical men shudder—that Arigo would write out or dictate, sometimes with hardly a look at the patient, with computer-like speed and certainty, again as if under the guidance of another intelligence. Ninety-six percent of his diagnoses were alleged to have correctly matched the best medical diagnoses available.

One of the more horrifying spectacles to be seen regularly at Arigo's sessions was his seemingly brutal operation for a not-too-well-differentiated batch of eye disorders including, however, obvious cataracts. These were reportedly done by the hundreds and invariably left witnesses, including dozens of ophthalmologists and surgeons who came to observe, gasping, if not retching. The knife would be none too gently thrust under a lid, mashed around seemingly at random and apparently deep into the tissues, with the eye sometimes rolling out of the socket and coming to rest on the cheek, and then withdrawn (after the eye had been put back in place) with no sign of pain from the completely unanesthetized patient and with little or no blood. Miraculously, the patient would go away "cured," the cataract patients able to see without lenses.

One account of this remarkable procedure is given in an "Afterword" by Dr. Henry Puharich who, with Henry Belk, one of his backers, several times made the journey to Congonhas do Campo to observe Arigo at work. On one occasion Arigo thrust a kitchen knife with a four-inch blade into Puharich's unwilling hand and ordered him to plunge it into a patient's eye socket between the eye and the upper lid. "Now when I moved the knife into the tissues of the eyeball and the eyesocket," writes Puharich, "I felt a repulsive force between the tissues and the knife. No matter how hard I pressed in, there was an equal and opposite force acting on my knife to prevent it from touching the tissues. This repulsive force was the secret of why no one felt pain when Arigo did his famous 'eye checkup.' My patient did not feel any pain from my knife manipulations either."

Unfortunately, despite numerous positive reports and testimonials from internists, surgeons, and ophthalmologists (according to the author no negative reports were turned up), there was little effort on the part of Brazilian scientists to investigate what actually was going on under Arigo's knife, or exactly what happened to the thousands of patients who faithfully took Arigo's drug prescriptions and carried out his treatment orders as to what to do when. The Brazilian Medical Association, despite individual dissents on the part of a number of its members (including former Brazilian President Kubitschek, a surgeon), continued rigidly opposed to the weird goings-on, while a good percentage of the Brazilian population, solid in their belief in an Allan Kardec form of spiritism, were supinely content to know simply that Dr. Adolpho Fritz's spirit was directing operations, and to leave the physiological and technical details up to him and his spirit colleagues. An American medical investigative team organized in 1969 by Puharich and Belk were forced to discontinue because of an overenthusiastic press swarming over the scene. Before they could return to do the job they wanted to do, Arigo was dead, the victim, on January 11, 1971, of an auto accident.

According to the author, John G. Fuller, a writer with a number of other books to his credit (perhaps the best known being *The Interrupted Journey*, the story of the highly publicized Betty and Barney Hill UFO encounter), not a single allegation of fraud was ever pinned on Arigo, unlike the situation with the Philippine healers; and despite rumors of kickbacks from prescription drug sales, no instance was ever proven. All this is to the good. If, therefore, one is able to accept the fact that paranormal events do occur now and then, and that there have been physical mediums and psychics who

have been able to modify and transcend ordinary physical causal arrangements in various ways, one can hardly avoid the feeling that José Pedro de Freitas, known as Arigo, may well have been a remarkable paranormal healer, may actually have done the astonishing things so widely attributed to him. But Fuller's book, interesting as it is (and despite the action photos and snippets from films that are included in it) does not in the last analysis provide the type of data from which parapsychologists (or any one else) can make reliable inferences and judgments. Puharich's six-page "Afterword," written in November 1973, leaves only the question of what happened to his notes (which we assume he must have made) of all the times he observed Arigo since 1963, when in fact a small benign fatty tumor termed a lipoma was removed by Arigo from his forearm. Fuller's description of this procedure, incidentally, is a prime example of the type of journalistic hyperbole one suspects infuses his reporting. Not content to write simply that this lipoma was easily removed in less than a minute without anesthetic or asepsis, Fuller insists that the same operation would take an ordinary surgeon fifteen or twenty minutes and would require hemostat control and cauterization of blood vessels. Probably any doctor with a bit of out-patient-clinic surgical experience would agree that a surgeon who took more than a couple of minutes for this shelling out of a superficial, well-encapsulated blob of fatty tissue under the skin, and with just a dab of cotton or gauze to control the minimal bleeding, should turn in his scalpel (or his press agent) and go into psychiatry. It is the type of thing that would not take a Houdini to do with his toes in fifteen minutes.

Nevertheless, the book is competently and interestingly written, if one doesn't mind a certain repetitiveness (after all, in how many different ways can you describe one miraculous healing after another) and a good deal of fictionalization of what after all must have come to the author as pretty bare data (e.g., "her eyes were moist"; "he prayed silently"). It is, at all events, the best report we have on Arigo in English (other accounts are cited in a bibliographic index), and for this we must be grateful. If there is some day another Arigo, I would like to see a somewhat more scientifically meaningful report made, but this one will certainly help us to be on the lookout for the next Arigo, and to be more serious in our efforts when we find one.

4634 E. 6th Ave.
Denver, Colo. 80220

JULE EISENBUD